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## ART. X. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *The Neighbours; a Story of Every-day Life*. By FREDERIKA BREMER. Translated from the Swedish. By MARY HOWITT. In Two Volumes. 12mo. Boston: James Munroe and Company.

WE are glad to meet with a readable edition of this charming book, — one, in which the type and paper suggest no notion of a conspiracy between the oculist and the printer, each playing into the other's hands, and each levying a per centage upon the other's receipts. We hope that the publishers will have no occasion to regret their enterprise in issuing it, after so many thousands of the newspaper edition had already been circulated; a form of printing which seems likely to take from the regular booksellers all their occupation in republishing English books, and which, we understand, has already wrought some astonishing conversions on the subject of International Copyright among the signers of the publishers' Memorial. What an excellent manufacturer of spectacles is self-interest, and how full of "moral suasion" are its dulcet tones!

The great popularity which this novel has enjoyed, and is enjoying, and which makes it unnecessary for us to enter into any detailed analysis of the story, or to point out with any minuteness its claims to favorable regard, is a compliment alike to the good taste of our people and the merits of the book itself. For, although the favor with which it has been received is to be ascribed partly to the new scenes and forms of life which it delineates, and partly to the fact that it describes a state of society and manner of living not unlike those of New England, yet we think, that its success rests not so much upon these elements as upon its truth, its simplicity, its naturalness, and its pure moral feeling; and it has been a source of gratification to us, that the power of appreciating these good qualities remains unimpaired in a community which has been so drugged with copious doses of Bulwer, Marryatt, and D'Israeli.

The scene of this novel is laid in Sweden, in the country, in our own age, and among persons in the middle ranks of life; consequently, the author relies upon the fidelity of her pictures, and the accuracy of her sketches, to awaken and keep alive the interest of the reader, and derives no aid from either the softening haze of antiquity, or the dazzling atmosphere of high life. It was an experiment of some boldness, but one in which her success has been complete. Her work is a new proof of the

power, with which genius is clothed, of finding the materials for poetry, and the elements of romantic fiction, in the life that lies around us, and in those joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, that bloom, like wild flowers, along that common highway that leads from the cradle to the grave. She has taught us to apprehend the force of Goethe's remark, that "Life outweighs all things, if love lies within it."

It begins, where most novels end, with a marriage. A physician, in the autumn of his life, selects for his wife a lady no longer young; and the early chapters describe, with great simplicity and beauty, the journey of the new married couple to their home, and their first experiments in housekeeping. As is not unfrequently the case in the Old World, it is a union brought about more by mutual esteem and confidence than by love; and the gradual unfolding of a warmer feeling in the breast of the grateful and conscientious wife is very pleasingly and naturally traced. The writer has not taken any considerable pains with the construction of her story, and many of her incidents are mere episodes, contributing nothing to the *dénouement* of the plot. It is rather an imaginary journal than any thing else, kept by a clever, observant, and warm-hearted woman, in which she sketches, for the amusement of an absent friend, the characters of her neighbours, and relates the events of her own tranquil home, and the occurrences that take place around her. The highest charm of the work, in our apprehension, dwells, from first to last, in the humble home of the hero and heroine, if we may so call them; a home dignified by tranquil virtue, blest with serene contentment, and bright with the sunshine of confiding love. Nor are we at all displeased with the occasional glimpses, which the young housekeeper gives us, into the flour-barrel and the store-closet, though, on one or two occasions, we confess, a fastidious taste might object that the principle of unreserve has been carried a little too far. The character of the husband, Dr. Werner, (we acknowledge that we grow a little weary of his *soubriquet* of "Bear"), is very happily conceived and executed; and, though perfectly natural, is by no means a commonplace one. His various excellences of mind and heart are gradually unfolded, and with no violations of probability; so that, though we begin with nothing more than respect, we end with reverence and admiration. And the artless simplicity and unaffected modesty with which the writer speaks of herself, her errors, her mistakes, her short-comings, her unreasonable fears, and her self-distrust, interest us also warmly in her, and give us assurance, that the good Doctor has chosen for his help-mate a loving and yet a strong nature, who will judge herself

with more severity than any one else, who will bear cheerfully her part of the burdens of life, and is only in danger of carrying the principle of self-sacrifice too far. The simple, homely beauty, and perfect naturalness, of some of the passages in their domestic life, can hardly be surpassed, and they touch, at once, the source of smiles and tears.

The most elaborately drawn character, and, on the whole, a very successful one, is that of the widowed mother-in-law. The combination which she presents, of high and stern qualities of character and resolute strength of will, with the homely virtues of thrift, order, punctuality, and good housekeeping, though not very uncommon in real life, is yet a difficult one for a writer of fiction to manage. When the attempt is made, the result is apt to be a sort of hybrid monster, in which the blending of the two classes of qualities is as violent and unnatural as the union of the two parts of a centaur or a mermaid. But this is not the case with "*Ma chère mère*," whose character is a harmonious whole, well proportioned and symmetrically developed. The conception is quite original, and it is very well executed and sustained. Her strong sense, her energy of will, her sternness, her fierce explosions of temper, her superficial harshness and real kindness of nature, her depth of feeling, and stoical power of suppressing all expressions of it, her excellent management of her household affairs, her economy, and practical knowledge of life, all conspire to produce a very impressive picture, which becomes more and more striking to the last. Her speeches and proverbs are rather too long and too frequent, and her severity of tongue seems sometimes carried too far. We confess, too, that we like her better in the quiet and every-day scenes, such as those in which she scolds and manages her forward daughters-in-law, than in those more impassioned ones, in which the deeper chords of her nature are struck, and which the author has most carefully elaborated. The scene immediately following the detection of her son's fault seems a little overdone, and the effects produced are rather disproportioned to the cause; but, on the other hand, the pathetic beauty of the reconciliation is of the highest order, and the heart of him is little to be envied who can read it unmoved. The incident, too, of her discovery of her own blindness, is strikingly and naturally told; and the softening influence of her revived affection for her son upon her stern nature is beautifully delineated. We feel that we owe an obligation to the writer, who has enriched the gallery of fiction with a portrait of a character at once so original and so natural, and which we may contemplate with the mind's eye with the highest satisfaction, though, in real life,

it might be somewhat of an inconvenience to have so formidable a person within visiting distance.

The writer has evidently labored the character of Bruno very much ; but here her success has not been so great. She is not so much at home in the dark, the terrible, and the tragic, as in the gentle, the domestic, and the feminine. He does not seem to be in unison with the rest of the picture ; and the tranquil landscape, into which he is thrown, forms hardly an appropriate background for the wild and stormy grandeur of a figure like his. The impression, which the character as a whole leaves upon us, is that it is not a perfectly natural one. There is too much of stage effect in him, and too many elements of the melo-dramatic hero, made up of starts and burnt cork. There is so much that is dangerous in his nature, that we cannot stifle a vague feeling of apprehension as to the happiness of the gentle and lovely being whose fate becomes linked with his. It seems like the lamb lying down with the lion, and we cannot but fear that his very caresses may draw blood. The incident of his killing the horse is a gratuitous piece of barbarity, for which we can hardly forgive him or the author. But we would not be understood by these criticisms as saying, that the character is a failure. Such is by no means the case, for it has great, though not unqualified, merit. We are provoked into making these unfavorable comparisons by the admirable skill with which the other characters are drawn ; and what we say in disparagement of Bruno must be taken as a compliment to the rest of the book. We wish that Hagar had been entirely omitted. She seems, from first to last, an unseemly excrescence ; and the tragedy with which she interrupts the "golden wedding" of the Dahls appears out of keeping and in bad taste. And, in spite of her death-bed confessions, we have some ugly misgivings on the subject of her relations with Bruno, and as to how far they may or may not have made him unworthy of Serena.

And Serena ; how shall we adequately express our sense of her serene and tranquil beauty, of that water-lily grace and purity that float softly around her, of that mild lunar light that beams from her gentle brow and eyes ? She recalls one of whom an English poet so beautifully sings ;

" A perfect woman, nobly planned  
To warn, to comfort, and command ;  
And yet a spirit still, and bright  
With something of an angel light."

Again do we thank the author for this fine picture of feminine excellence, in which we see so admirably harmonized and blended all the best attributes of a womanly nature ; imagina-

tion, sensibility, taste, high sense of duty, religious faith, cultivation, united with warm affections, practical good sense, knowledge of common things, a cheerful temperament, and the daily, unrepining discharge of lowly duties. There is always danger that a character like hers, in the hands of a writer of fiction, will degenerate into insipidity. But from that danger our author has most happily escaped, and she has made her as interesting as she is innocent and lovely; thanks to the touch of a pencil at once firm, delicate, and discriminating. She glides from house to house, and from scene to scene, like a sunbeam, making every one feel that they are nearer heaven, while she is with them. As we lay down the book, we feel as if she must be a person whom we had known and loved, who had given us a new sense of the capacities of humanity, and we involuntarily call down a benediction upon her head, and pray that her "life may be all poetry."

There are many other characters, drawn with more or less excellence, and all giving us that impression of reality, which is so sure a test of the creative hand of genius. There are also many lively and entertaining scenes, described with great spirit and truth, showing an uncommon power of observation, a strong, though well-regulated, perception of the ludicrous, and a marked talent for satirical painting. And on almost every page, we find a casual remark, a reflection, a little trait of human goodness or of human weakness, which fairly startles us by its truth, and by its reminding us of something in our own experience. What a touch of nature, for instance, there is in the self-distrust with which Madame Werner goes to visit the Dahls, (vol. i. p. 154,) feeling that she will be no more welcome than a dun, and then, when she is so warmly and cordially received, saying to herself, with all the alacrity of self-disparagement, that it is all on her husband's account! How perfectly natural, too, is the breaking up of the party at the Dahls', (vol. ii. p. 180,) where "*Ma chère mère*," after all the guests are shawled and cloaked for their departure, seizes her violin and plays a merry tune, and all the company begin dancing in their strange costume! Who has not marked the same reluctance to leave a pleasant party, when the spirits are all attuned to enjoyment, and a light form is seen to bound into the drawing-room to take a farewell whirl in her cloak and moccasins? These little touches, like Shakspeare's Cæsar asking Antony to pass round and to speak to him in the other ear, because he was deaf on one side, mark, more than any thing else, the master hand.

The impression which the book, as a whole, leaves upon us,

is one of great truth and fidelity to nature in all its essential elements. We have remarked, that it delineates a kind of life not unlike our own in New England, the resemblance being suggested by the long winters, the indoor occupations, the general cultivation, and the absence of any marked differences of rank and fortune. But in one respect, there is an emphatic distinction, and a similarity to the manners and social habits delineated in German works of fiction. There is a great deal more of the expression of feeling of all kinds. Emotions lie much nearer the surface than among us, where something of coldness and reserve characterizes the intercourse of friends and relatives. Tears, kisses, embraces, claspings of the hand, and enthusiastic speeches, are in much more common circulation than with us. There are many things described as taking place, which, judged by our standard, would seem extravagant and unnatural, not to say in bad taste or even ludicrous; and some of the communications which the new-married wife makes to her correspondent startle us as being very unreserved. But we must be careful not to judge of these things by our own standard, till we are assured that this is the true one, and that we do not err towards the other extreme of apathy, coldness, and reserve. We can have no question, that these things are perfectly natural to a Swede or a German, and that our habits would strike him as singular and repulsive.

But the highest charm of the book is its pure and healthy tone of moral feeling. The lessons which it teaches are weighty, and impressively conveyed. It shows us how much better a contented spirit is than houses and lands, — what pure and un-failing sources of happiness are to be found in that culture of the moral, intellectual, and social nature, from which no human being is excluded. It gives cheerful and animating views of human life and the Providence that governs it, and teaches us that no life can be unhappy, which is dedicated to duty and quickened by the affections. It proclaims the value of those simple and natural pleasures which lie scattered at our feet, and which may be freely enjoyed without wealth, or conspicuous station, or high endowments. The author's mind is an eminently healthy one, and such is the tone of her book. It breathes over the mind with a bracing and invigorating influence, akin to that of the mountain wind upon the bodily frame. She has looked at the world through no false and distorting medium of pride or gloom. We hear no voice of whining discontent, or sullen misanthropy, or querulous distress. And, above all, we recognize with peculiar pleasure her emphatic testimony against the pestilent doctrine, that great powers necessarily produce

great misery, that susceptibility to beauty is only productive of keener pangs of disappointment, and that the more finely attuned souls must of necessity be jangled into harsher discord. High gifts, superior endowments, fine susceptibilities, are increased means of enjoyment; and it is only from the abuse and perversion of them, that misery and discontent arise. It is from the indulgence of the selfish passions, that most of the unhappiness of life springs. The first rule, to insure happiness, is, to forget one's self, and the second is, to remember others; and we honor and feel grateful to the author of "The Neighbours," for the power and beauty with which she has enforced these truths.

We hope to have the remaining works of Miss Bremer presented to us in an English dress. If they are as good as this one, they will prove permanent and valuable accessions to our literature, taking their place side by side with our best novels of domestic life. The task of the translator seems to have been performed in some haste, for we have noticed some careless, and a few clumsy, expressions, which might easily have been improved. Can it be true, that the book was translated directly from the Swedish? From some phrases, we should infer a German original.

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2. — *Commentaries on the Law of Bills of Exchange, Foreign and Inland, as administered in England and America; with Occasional Illustrations from the Commercial Law of the Nations of Continental Europe.* By JOSEPH STORY, L.L. D., one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Dane Professor of Law in Harvard University. Boston: Little & Brown. 1843. 8vo. pp. 608.

ANOTHER work from Mr. Justice Story comes before us. Volume presses after volume, filling us with amazement at the productiveness and learning of the author. On some future occasion we hope to consider at length the merits of these works, and to endeavour to form an estimate of the position of the writer. For the present, we confine ourselves to a brief notice of the book before us.

On the threshold, we are met by a peculiarity in the treatment of the subject, which is worthy of attention. The Law of Bills of Exchange is presented separate from that of Promissory Notes, and other negotiable securities of a kindred nature. This plan differs essentially from that adopted by all the English elemen-